

# American and Russian Artists

## Bryson Burroughs and the Late Willard Straight

By Royal Cortissoz

At this end of the season the works of foreigners seem to become more and more numerous in the galleries. In a month or two, when the long procession of exhibitions has been wound up, it may be amusing to frame some sort of statistical record of our alien visitors. There has never been anything like it before. The fashionable portrait painter imported from abroad we have always had with us; but nowadays, while he is still to be reckoned with, he is accompanied by colleagues of every type. Swiss art, Spanish art, Slav art,

conspicuous in modern art. Sometimes a master has arisen like Delacroix whose brush has easily kept pace with his inspiration. But often the pressure of ideas has been too strong for the technician, who has been hampered, if not submerged, by the material processes inseparable from his task. Consider the handicap under which the imaginative Gustave Moreau labored in France. Consider the technical limitations of the whole pre-Raphaelite group in England. Consider the difficulties of execution with which our own A. P. Ryder struggled. What

a wonderfully profitable way of drawing. Let it be rooted in an inborn gift and the results are bound to have unusual quality.

These drawings are unusual in two respects. They have marked ease, marked spontaneity, and they have extraordinary precision. There is something also to be said for their veracity, for the persuasiveness with which they interpret character. It is not only in his careful portraits of his white friends that Straight discloses a feeling for the truth. He has it also in his most casual studies of the Oriental, the picturesque native observed in the streets and jotted down in a sketch-book as so much "local color." Alike in the structure of a head and in the hang of a garment, this keen-eyed draftsman is luminously convincing. But over and above what we might call the documentary value of his Chinese, Japanese, Korean and other types, there is this technical ease of which we have spoken, the idiom of the true artist as distinguished from the globe-trotter taking notes. In drawings like the "House Boy" (No. 78) or the "Priest at Wang-Fu-Tang" (No. 50) or the "Novice" (No. 57) we forget all about the portraiture involved, rejoicing simply in the clean, firm touch of the artist's pencil. He appears to have worked in color now and then. The "Chinese Coolie" (No. 71), a delightful pastel, is perhaps the best example. But it is as a black and white technician of rare dexterity that he makes his special appeal.

Imagination lingers over the thought of what he might have accomplished if he had gone on in this path, perhaps taking a wider sweep in color, perhaps adding composition and the interest of pictorial invention to his resources. There can be no doubt that he had in him the makings of a brilliant artist, for here it is plain that he had in him the root of the matter. The exhibition deepens regret for his untimely death.

### Out of Doors

#### Some Recent Types in American Landscape

At the Kraushaar gallery there are some new pictures by Mr. Gifford Beal, portraits and open air subjects. The portraits are well enough, but remain, on the whole, negligible canvases. There is little more to be said of several of the miscellaneous canvases shown. But there are three paintings, having a wall to themselves, to which



MANCHU WOMAN  
(From the drawing by Willard Straight at the Arden gallery, reproduced by courtesy of "Asia")

and air, like the Hudson River piece, but in another key. Then to show that he has still one more string to his bow Mr. Beal paints his "Hunters and Hounds," a picture of great trees, sunlight, an affair of luscious masses of foliage. We don't grudge him the lesser canvases which hang about. But we confess that the show as a whole—and a good one—consists or just these three handsome paintings.

Several painters have the space at the Macbeth gallery. In the first room Mr. F. C. Frieske and Mr. Albert L. Groll exhibit together. The former varies a little his familiar motive, but not his familiar method. "By the River" is a graceful composition and the web of landscape forms is daintily drawn. But most of his pictures are but repetitions of the pretty decorative effect which has so long been characteristic of him. It is astonishingly well done, but it leaves no permanent impression. Mr. Frieske is an undeniably clever Salonnière, who is to say that his deftness is wreaked

cool breeze from the sea. It is the danger of overemphasis. Nature, we are willing to believe, is accountable for the sunlight which flickers on the surface of Mr. Lie's rich hued waters, and when the sun lies on the other side of the broad sails with which he is apt to fill his middle distance their dark patches make an inevitable foil to the fragments of light that get through the interstices of the composition. Yet nature generally avoids the staccato effect into which Mr. Lie seems so often to be lured. We like that effect. It is bold, brilliant and very characteristic of Mr. Lie and of no other. But we can't help wanting a little more atmospheric envelopment of the picture, a design no less ingeniously balanced, yet fuller, subtler, a little more tender.

To ask this, however, is possibly to ask Mr. Lie to be somebody else, which would be absurd in itself and a bit ungrateful in the bargain. For his way is a robust, ingratiating way, lavish of good color, full of a sound workman's enjoyment of his instruments and his medium, and, despite the faint hint of a factitious handling of light, remarkably interpretative of the truth. Looking at a winter scene like the "House by the Stream" we feel that, after all, it is probably only a question of time—that when these canvases have mellowed the painter will be justified of his hypothesis, a settlement of the pigment bringing the charm which needs to be added to his power. While we are waiting we wouldn't be sorry to hear that he had begun to interest himself in more gracious harmonies, painting flowers, for example, with a more delicate touch. Delicacy of touch, a greater suavity, would greatly increase his already substantial claim upon public attention.

### Repin

#### The Most Noted of the Modern Russians

In the movement which has little by little been making us acquainted with the Russian painters, Ilya Repin comes late, who should, perhaps, have come first. He was born in 1844 and so came to his artistic maturity long before modernism was dreamed of, long before types like Bakst had become possible. There is a collection of his paintings at the Kingore gallery, fairly representative, we take it, of the method through which he has laid the foundations of a successful career. It is the method, in a nutshell, of the Academy, vivified by the traits of a thoughtful and emotional commentator on Russian life and history. He has been the equivalent in his own land of those men in Paris who have made the backbone of the Salon, men like Roll, or the accomplished painter who has this moment passed from the scene, Jean Paul Laurens. This is to say that he has known how to build up great compositions, how to take an episode from the dramatic annals of Russia and give it imposing pictorial form, the life and color of a magnificent illustration. In the nuances of craftsmanship the analogy between French and Russian practice breaks down. Laurens, for example, was the master of a cleaner cut, better organized technique than Repin's. But they had the same point of view.

The Russian is a kind of rough-and-ready realist, seeing his subjects in large terms, painting solid forms with a certain swing and force, making much of the elementary emotions that stamp men's faces. His most famous picture is "The Cossacks' Reply to the Sultan," in which uproarious warriors gather around the inditing of a defiant missive. They laugh, shout, gesticulate. The theme is violent and so, in a measure, is the painting of it. Repin has never been the man for half tones. His portraits, of which several are here exhibited, are like his subject pictures in that they denote a strong, direct grasp upon surface fact. There is always characterization, of a sort, in his heads, as there is in his gestures, but it never seems to penetrate very far. There is, to put it frankly, a trace of the theater about Repin. He paints thrilling tableaux. The thrill lasts for a moment and then loses its force as one comes to inquire into these canvases as illustrations of the art of painting, pure and simple. In that character they reveal ability, but no magic; all the adroitness of a well trained man of his hands and no distinction of style.

The Russian painters who are brought to us have been important to Russia and some of them have proved interesting to us. Repin is interesting. Roerich was, at the Kingore gallery a little while ago, and so was Avdonin, at the Ainslie gallery. But the school does not always lift, upon the American horizon at all events, interesting figures. There are some further souvenirs of it at the Ainslie gallery, some spirited water colors of hunting subjects, painted by A. S. Chrenoff, and pictures by twelve other men. One of these exhibitors, Orlovsky, the painter of the "Evening Shadows," is moderately clever in the treatment of landscape. But this show leaves the Russian school where it found it, a school not yet in a commanding position in modern art.

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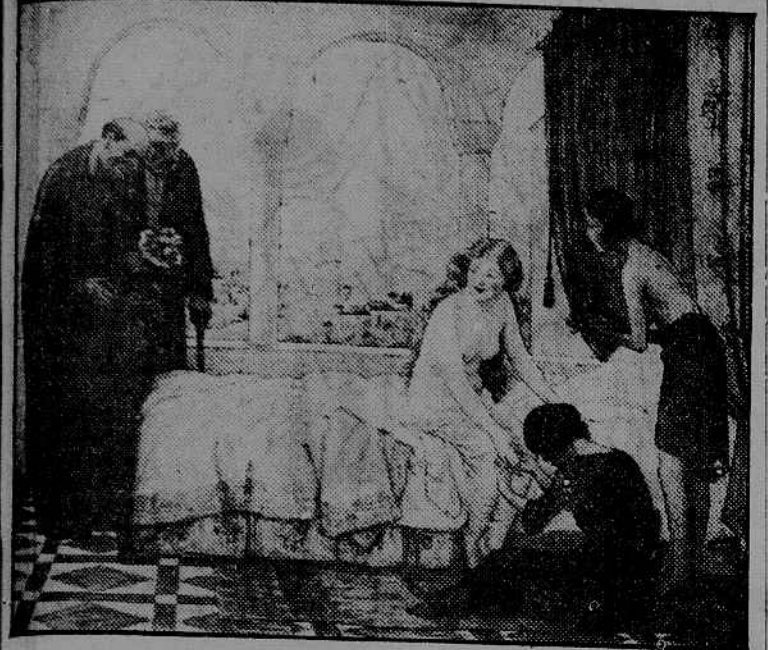
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AT MAGDALA  
(From the painting by Bryson Burroughs at the Montross gallery)

European art in general, we see to-day with extraordinary frequency. It is all educational, in a sense. The American public is given the opportunity to form its own judgment on hitherto unfamiliar figures. It is interesting to note that that public, in the midst of the cosmopolitan campaign, remains unshaken in its steadily more widespread fidelity to the art of our own school. We are sympathetic toward the foreigners, especially toward those whose reputations have been turned in this direction by the results of the war. But not all the propaganda in the world can undo the lesson we have been learning, that American art has its valid high claims. It is not a question of patriotism; it is a question of taste.

### Ideas

How They Sometimes Outstrip the Technician  
A suggestive essay might be written in the painters who have been so engaged in what they have had to say that their way of saying it has suffered. The phenomenon has been especially

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### BLACK SEA PIRATE TYPE

(From the painting by Ilya Repin at the Kingore gallery)

Mr. Beal might justly have confined his exhibition. They would have given it sufficient weight. One is the Hudson River scene which he calls "Fate of the Highlands." It is big in scale and big in spirit. In the last few years this artist seems to have taken on a new vitality, and the picture in question fairly brims over with it. The scene is vast, panoramic, and its masculine note is maintained in every aspect of the composition. Big as it is, this design "holds together." It is a strong pictorial unit. The brushwork is vigorous, to match, and at the same time it is somehow intimately expressive of the sentiment of the place. It is a landscape of character. Almost, if not quite, on the same successful plane is the neighboring picture, the "Morning Riders," with its architectural masses lifted above the rocks and trees of Central Park, a painting full of light

### Random Impressions In Current Exhibitions

Mr. Carle J. Blenner would revive the vogue of full-blooded, decorative flower painting, the motive which was so popular in the eighteenth century in France and the Low Countries, swerving toward the greater informality of our own day. It has been subordinated for a long time to the more intimate conception of flower painting in Paintin-Latour and in this country by Maria Oakley Dewing. But it has a vitality of its own, the vitality of the great artful of bloom, massed with some thought of design. Mr. Blenner's paintings are at the Levy gallery, where they make a rich and decidedly engag-

A group of six or seven painters is exhibiting in the galleries of the Sal-

(Continued on next page)